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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 001022

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/01/2018  
TAGS: [KJUS](#) [KMPI](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SA](#)  
SUBJECT: UPDATE ON JAILED POLITICAL ACTIVIST MATRUK AL-FALEH

REF: A. SECSTATE 64901  
[1](#)B. RIYADH 959

Classified By: CG John Kincannon for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) During a June 28 meeting with noted Saudi political and human rights activist Ibrahim al-Mugaiteeb (protect), PolOff spoke by telephone with Jameela al-Ughla, wife of imprisoned Saudi political activist Matruk al-Faleh (Reftel A, B). An emotionally upset al-Ughla told PolOff that she had not had any communication with her husband since a May 25, 2008 meeting. (NOTE: Per public reporting, this meeting was held at the high-security Haer prison, where her husband was being held, located outside Riyadh. END NOTE.) Al-Ughla said that since that meeting, she had not received any information from third parties regarding the condition, location or charges against her husband, despite repeated attempts by al-Ughla to contact King Abdullah and the Ministry of Interior, and ongoing communication with officials from the Human Rights Commission (HRC). Al-Ughla said that she is particularly concerned because of her husband's poor health (al-Faleh is diabetic), and his attempt to stage a hunger strike in protest of his detention.

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HRC GIVES ACCESS, SPEAKING TO THE MEDIA TAKES IT AWAY?  
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[1](#)2. (C) Though a June 29 Reuters article claims that "After some pleading, prison officials who felt pity agreed to take Ukla (sic) to the high-security Haer prison," al-Mugaiteeb said that the primary reason al-Ughla was given access to her husband was due to the intervention of HRC Chairman Turki ibn Khaled al-Sudairi. Al-Mugaiteeb, a member of the HRC, did not elaborate on the specific bureaucratic actions taken by al-Sudairi, but stated that the Chairman "set up" the meeting between husband and wife, working through the Ministry of Interior (MOI). (NOTE: Al-Mugaiteeb added that, despite the fact the Commission reports directly to the King, due to the HRC's inability to develop a broad support network among the highest ranks of the royal family, the influence wielded by al-Sudairi within interagency battles has diminished significantly since his appointment to the position in September 2005. END NOTE).

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POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF AL-FALEH'S DETENTION  
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[1](#)3. (C) The effects of the arrest of al-Faleh go well beyond the problems experienced by his family. In a June 25 meeting, noted women's rights activist Wajeha al-Huwaider said that she is acting with a great deal of caution now as she believes the SAG is in a phase of responding strongly to punish domestic critics, as evidenced by the Abdullah al-Hamed and Matruk al-Faleh detentions. She also stated that these SAG actions are hindering any positive momentum in creating unofficial grassroots civil organizations, with new members hard to come by given the perceived threat of

government action.

¶4. (C) Additionally, al-Mugaiteeb, who holds power of attorney for al-Faleh, pointed out the curious recent behavior of famous human rights lawyer Abdulrahman al-Lahem as another possible example of the consequences of increased SAG pressure. According to al-Mugaiteeb, al-Lahem, who also holds power of attorney for al-Faleh, has refused without explanation two separate requests - one by al-Ughla - to provide any assistance in al-Faleh's case (NOTE: It is a common practice for human rights activists in the Kingdom to hold powers of attorney for one another, this to assist in accessing information if one is imprisoned. END NOTE). Al-Mugaiteeb also said that in his role as HRC member he recently referred a high-profile capital punishment case to al-Lahem as well, which al-Lahem again refused. Al-Mugaiteeb said that he believes these unexplained refusals might be al-Lahem reacting to threats from the Ministry of Interior, particularly on the sensitive issue of his current travel ban. Despite not being the subject of any court verdicts or proceedings, al-Lahem has been banned since 2004 from leaving Saudi Arabia. The ban, which supposedly lasts five years, will keep him from traveling to the July 2008 World Justice Project conference in Vienna, where he is to be recognized with the American Bar Association's "International Human Rights Lawyer Award." Al-Lahem had worked with HRC Chairman al-Sudairi in an attempt to lift the ban, but without success. According to an HRC statement in a June 24 Arab News article, the HRC had received no response from the MOI regarding its request about al-Lahem's status.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: Human rights advocates in the Kingdom

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believe that al-Ughla's statements to the national and international press are a primary cause for the lack of any communication since the May 25 meeting. According to this argument, the SAG reacts harshly to efforts to sway governmental decisions through the use of media, and the degree of public exposure received by the al-Faleh detention has made the SAG even more recalcitrant. The argument continues that, while you may suffer in silence, by staying quiet and accepting what the SAG offers in the way of outreach or mercy you will receive less severe treatment. This advice does not seem to have affected al-Ughla, however, as she continues to speak to media representatives about her husband's case. While activists agree on the repercussions of speaking to the press, there is ongoing debate regarding how to properly address al-Faleh's situation. While al-Mugaiteeb has advocated peaceful public demonstrations that are specific to al-Faleh's case, other human rights leaders, such as Riyadh-based Ali al-Gudaimi, advocate continuing to focus on broader issues, rather than specific cases, and avoiding public spectacles and direct confrontations. END COMMENT.

(APPROVED: JKINCANNON)  
FRAKER